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SUBJECT: CALM PREVAILS AS GHANAIANS GO TO THE POLLS

Classified By: POL CHIEF GARY PERGL FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. Ghanaians voted last Sunday for President and members of Parliament in an election that was remarkably orderly and peaceful. The Electoral Commission, true to its word, was well prepared, and very few problems were reported throughout the day. The presidential election, two days after the vote, is still too close to call, with 197 out of 230 constituencies counted. The ruling National Patriotic Party (NPP) candidate Nana Akufo-Addo has 49.62 percent of the vote, while the opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC) candidate John Atta-Mills has 47.34 percent. The big stories are the possibility that the opposition party will take over control of Parliament with a gain of 22 seats (while the NPP stands to lose 16 seats), the fall of several prominent members of Parliament and government Ministers, and the virtual shutout of third party candidate Papa Kwesi Nduom of the Convention Peoples Party (CPP). The US Mission fielded some 100 observers in all regions; all of them reported a free and fair election at the polling stations they observed, and all have returned safely. While all has gone well so far, the election is not over until a winner has been declared, and we and other players are refraining from commenting on the nature of the election until the fat lady has sung. END SUMMARY

¶2. (U) Almost all 22,000 polling stations opened on time, and were fully staffed with the requisite Electoral Commission (EC) presiding officer and assistants who had ballots, ballot boxes, voting booths, voter registers and indelible ink at the ready. Mission observers were in place before polls opened at 7 a.m. to observe opening preparations at a selected polling station in the constituencies which we had decided to target. In the north, our observers reported a heavy security presence in areas such as Tamale, Bawku, Yendi, and Bolgatanga, which had been considered possible flashpoints. Throughout the country, any time a dispute arose, the rapid response forces put together for election security arrived quickly and restored calm.

¶3. (U) Voters in many areas began lining up as early as 4 a.m., and many observers reported long lines of voters at the beginning of the polling day. Those lines tended to diminish in most areas, although some polling places, especially those with a large number of transfer voters around universities, had to remain open long after the polls closed at 5 p.m. to allow everyone to cast their votes. For the most part, voters waited patiently in line, sometimes for many hours, without registering complaint. The voter register was not a point of contention, an issue that had been considered a potential problem area prior to polling day. From all accounts, voter turnout was heavy. Party polling agents for the two major parties, who play an important watchdog role, seemed to be well trained and present in all polling stations.

¶4. (U) Radio and television stations provided extensive, almost non-stop coverage of the elections, with correspondents reporting from all regions. As soon as ballot

counting began, stations broadcast results, polling station by polling station, then constituency by constituency, and that is continuing even today. All in all, the media did a superb job of informing, remaining impartial, and maintaining calm during the entire process.

15. (U) We have checked with the European Union delegation, the Coalition of Domestic Election Observers, and observer teams from other diplomatic missions in Ghana. All have reported similar findings to ours. With the exception of minor scuffles at a few polling stations, the election itself was a model of decorum and tranquility. We have heard no reports of violence or physical injury. Police and military moved in to do some crowd control in Tamale and Bawku, but both situations were brought under control quickly.

16. (U) A real possibility of a huge shift in parliamentary seats has been the big story of this election. Incumbent MPs appear to be losing a large number of seats, especially on the NPP side, and the ruling party may actually lose control of Parliament. Of 155 constituencies so far reported, NPP incumbents have lost 20 seats (they have gained seats in other areas previously held by NDC), while NDC incumbents have lost 12 seats. This was an unexpected turn of events, and would appear to show a real sophistication on the part of Ghanaian voters, who apparently aren't terribly impressed by the fact that you are a Minister if you are not taking care of the folks back home. At least three parliamentary contests appear to be headed to the high courts to settle disputes based on flawed recounts, missing ballot boxes, or other discrepancies. The opposition NDC party is predicting that they will win 116 seats of the 230 in Parliament, to

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squeeze out a one-seat majority. So far, their math appears good to us.

17. (U) The NDC issued two press statements yesterday, asserting that from their reading of returns, they had won the election, and questioning the amount of time it was taking the Electoral Commission to announce results (with the implication that the delay was due to vote fixing). The NPP issued a strong rebuke to the first NDC statement, but was more measured in responding to the second (and even more inflammatory) declaration, saying that everyone should await the results from the EC. The EC chairman also came out with a pointed statement condemning the NDC's premature declaration of victory, saying only he is authorized to announce results. Several other NGOs and media commentators have also condemned the NDC's inappropriate comments, which should serve to fend off any further posturing from the party.

18. (C) COMMENT: Although we are pleased with the conduct of the election so far, we and other major players are holding back on pronouncements regarding the nature of the elections. It is not too late for the two parties to do something foolish. Early judgment also risks being misinterpreted by the parties as an endorsement of their early claims of victory. Most importantly, the Electoral Commission will be strengthened by being seen as the major player in the election. Although some observer groups, including the Carter Center, European Union, and ECOWAS, have made statements today, they discussed only the conduct of polling day. They will hold back on the election as a whole until final results are known.

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